

VZCZCXRO5933
RR RUEH DU RUEHJO
DE RUEHSA #2249/01 2890800
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 150800Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5997
INFO RUEHOR/AMEMBASSY GABORONE 5367
RUEHSB/AMEMBASSY HARARE 3730
RUEHTO/AMEMBASSY MAPUTO 5955
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 6118
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 0258
RUEHJO/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG 8466

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 002249

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KTIP](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: IOM SURVEY: HUMAN TRAFFICKING INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA

REF: PRETORIA 1926

Summary

¶1. A survey of internal trafficking in persons (TIP) due for release on October 29 reveals that TIP is a nationwide problem in South Africa, with domestic as well as cross-border victims. Funded by USAID under the auspices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the survey indicates that criminal TIP activities include not just commercial sexual exploitation but also domestic servitude; agricultural labor; street work -- such as vending, begging, and crime; and the "muti" practice of harvesting human body parts for traditional medicine. The report's poignant case stories promise to attract media attention, improve public awareness, and enhance SAG knowledge of trafficking patterns. While passage of draft legislation remains the key hurdle to mobilizing a comprehensive anti-TIP effort, in the meantime IOM and the SAG are working to educate law enforcement and the public.
End Summary.

IOM Survey Overview

¶2. On September 11 researcher Laura Gauer Bermudez previewed to USAID and poloff the results of her survey of "internal" (domestic) trafficking in persons (TIP). Funded by USAID under the auspices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the study was conducted from March through June 2008 in all nine provinces of South Africa. A total of 225 community activists, church and social workers, and law enforcement personnel were polled on awareness of various types of trafficking, and information was then gathered on modes of recruitment, transport, and exploitation. The final report, due for release on October 29, includes powerful personal stories likely to draw much-needed attention to the TIP problem. The internal survey also paves the way for a regional multi-country TIP study which the SAG will contract late this year.

SA Vulnerabilities: Poverty, AIDS,...

¶3. Poverty and economic disparity, AIDS, widespread gender violence, and lack of TIP legislation make South Africans especially vulnerable to trafficking. With half the population below the poverty line and unemployment at 23 percent, many who are desperate for work will trust promises of jobs in faraway places where the economy is robust. Economic migration, a longstanding practice for men, is

increasing among women breadwinners and even child orphans, as the AIDS epidemic destroys families. Fear of HIV/AIDS has also fueled demand for virgins and children in the sex industry. In a largely patriarchal culture with exceptionally high prevalence of rape and gender violence, victims fleeing forced marriages or family abuse may fall prey to traffickers. Comprehensive legislation against TIP is still in draft, handicapping efforts to pursue and prosecute offenders.

53 Percent Awareness of 5 TIP Types

¶4. While IOM correctly cautions that its sample size was too small and deliberately selected to be generalized, the survey nevertheless indicated a high prevalence of trafficking nationwide. Among all 225 respondents, 53 percent were directly aware of TIP (e.g. directly assisting victims), 18 percent were indirectly aware of it (believing it occurred locally but unable to cite specific cases), and 29 percent were unaware of it occurring in their areas. Respondents were unaware of it occurring in their areas. Respondents unaware of TIP were generally in managerial rather than front-line roles. Whites and Indians were most often unaware of TIP, whereas direct awareness was most common among blacks and persons designated as 'coloured.'

¶5. To overcome the common misperception that TIP relates only to sex workers and to cross-border traffic, IOM's survey described an array of TIP behavior and measured five TIP categories:

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- commercial sexual exploitation
- domestic servitude
- agricultural labor
- street work (vending, begging, and crime)
- "muti" (organ removal for traditional medicine)

These five TIP types show some regional variation. Awareness of commercial sexual exploitation was highest in Gauteng, Western Cape, and Free State. The same three provinces led in awareness of street work, although at lowest levels of all TIP types. The Western Cape showed high awareness of domestic servitude. The muti trade was acknowledged mostly in the eastern provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, as well as in Gauteng.

Rural Victims, Ruthless Recruiters

¶6. Respondents said trafficked persons were mainly poor young blacks, recruited from rural areas with job promises. Victims were most often black teenage girls, followed by females 21 to 30 years old, particularly for sex work, but targets also included young coloured girls for domestic work and boys for farm and street labor. Victims were lured by promises of lucrative (and legal) jobs enabling them to better their own lives and send money home to their families. Posing as employment agencies, traffickers put job ads in local newspapers to dupe girls into domestic servitude. Recruiters for the sex trade were just as likely to be women as men, and they were often trusted family members, acquaintances, or neighbors. While most were individual black South Africans, they spanned all races (even Chinese), and Nigerian crime syndicates were frequently cited. Traffickers controlled victims through intimidation and threats, use of force, demands to pay job "debts," and even use of drugs and alcohol.

Sex Trade Still Most Prevalent

17. Sex work -- forced prostitution and pornography -- was the TIP category of which respondents were most aware. Policing of the sex trade was seen as lax, and cops often failed to distinguish TIP victims from other sex workers. Cases tended to be dropped due to poor evidence. Sex trafficking was strongly linked to organized crime, with victims sometimes swapped or sold to new places when their earnings fell off. Whereas typical victims used to be runaways who fell prey to city pimps, nowadays syndicates proactively sent recruiters to rural towns. AIDS orphans were vulnerable to adult traffickers, and children were more in demand as a means to avoid HIV. Young boys were increasingly exploited for homosexual activity and pornography. Demand came from mid-to-upper income men over 40 years of age, including for business entertaining, in downtown and suburban areas of main cities, with new venues recently proliferating near football stadiums in advance of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Daughters into Domestic Servitude

18. South Africa's very unequal distribution of wealth generates both a supply of poor working girls and a demand by rich households to buy them as domestic servants. According to the survey, the Western Cape had especially organized networks of employment agencies trading in teens and young women, with coloured girls preferred. Although the law forbids employment of persons under 15 years of age, respondents said the Department of Labour lacked enforcement capacity, and there was minimal monitoring or punishment of lawbreakers. Respondents said the Department of Labour lacked enforcement capacity, and there was minimal monitoring or punishment of lawbreakers. Recruits were reportedly bused to Cape Town suburbs, kept in small rooms of 20-30 girls, and paraded before prospective employers. Employers paid the agency a purchase price, which the victims were then debt-bonded to repay from their meager wages. Poverty compelled parents to send their daughters into this kind of employment, even knowingly, despite denial of access to schooling and risk of sexual abuse by employers. Shame and need for income prevented girls from escaping, and those who attempted to flee often felt victim to traffickers in the sex trade.

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Boys into Farm Labor, Street Work

19. Respondents said men and boys were also TIP victims, sold for forced labor on farms and recruited for street work in vending, begging, and crime. Small-scale private contractors rounded up groups of boys then offered them to farmers for a fee. Contract labor was used in this way to circumvent minimum age and minimum wage laws. Just as their sisters were sent away to be servants, boys from cash-strapped families were dispatched to earn money, although they were often paid little or nothing to work long hours and live in substandard housing. Parents' prior consent prevented police from pressing charges against ringleaders. In many cases, orphans were vulnerable to labor trafficking. For street work, older boys recruited younger children as beggars since they were able to elicit more charity, and as thieves since their small bodies could slip through more spaces.

"Muti" Organ Removal

10. "Muti," the Zulu word for medicine, is applied to the harvesting of human body organs for use in homemade remedies by tribal medicine men, particularly in rural areas of Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Respondents' accounts refer to theft of genitalia, wombs, embryos and placentas, intestines,

tongues, and hands and feet. Although victims normally die from the attack, it is conducted when they are still alive. Perpetrators are often said to be youths looking for quick cash by selling body parts to traditional healers. Hundreds of muti cases are estimated to occur each year in South Africa, but the practice is taboo, and few witnesses are willing to testify. While the act may not fit the strict U.N. definition of trafficking if the victim is not transported from one place to another, still it meets the criteria of targeting, exploitation, and for-profit sale of other human beings.

Recommendations

¶11. IOM's report concludes with a list of recommendations to improve SAG's capacity to combat human trafficking. First and foremost is to accelerate drafting, passage, and implementation of the specific anti-TIP legislation currently moving slowly through the SAG's legislative process. Awareness of the problem should be raised through a range of educational and media programs, both in vulnerable rural communities and nationwide, and community watch initiatives to alert groups to predators. Police should more vigorously control the sex trade, with alertness and sensitivity to signs of TIP, and attention to victims should be more systematically defined. Rural development is essential to redress TIP's root cause of poverty.

Interim Steps, While Awaiting the Law

¶12. COMMENT: Per Post's past reporting (reftel), South Africa is committed to combating the scourge of human trafficking. The key hurdle remains comprehensive anti-TIP legislation, which is still in the drafting process. A tough, focused law is necessary to grant resources and authorities to law enforcement, the judiciary, and social services to punish perpetrators and protect victims of trafficking. In the meantime, however, IOM and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA)'s Sexual Offences and Community Affairs (SOCA) unit are conducting police training and public awareness campaigns to pave the way for a more comprehensive legislative response. On issues with close linkages to TIP, such as violence against women and organized crime, SOCA and the NPA have taken strong steps. This IOM survey, and the regional one soon to follow, will contribute needed information on TIP flows, patterns, and modus operandi, bringing the SAG one step closer to ending them. End Comment.

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